



At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged
(Acts 28:15 NIV).

Pastoral Letter after 18th General Convention of Synod

Dear fellow members of the LCA,

It is with gratitude to God that I write to you after our recent General Convention of Synod in Rochedale, Queensland. I write on behalf of the College of Bishops, which met on Monday after Convention to reflect on how best it might serve you at this time.

The Convention was blessed with wonderful local hosts, a superb venue, perfect weather, good food and peaceful surroundings. We give thanks to our God for these people and things, and we especially thank him for the daily worship, the presence of his Spirit, the strengthening power of Word and Sacrament and a willing spirit among those present.

As I daily looked across the room of delegates I frequently felt as St Paul did in Acts 28:15. Seeing the people gathered together in faith encouraged me, despite our debate on a

difficult doctrinal issue. We handled many important matters during the Convention, but the one everyone was waiting for was the proposal 'that the LCA accepts the ordination of both men and women and amends Theses of Agreement VI and the Constitution accordingly.' On Saturday, after hours of respectful dialogue and debate over the previous two days and Scripture and prayer led by chaplains, delegates came forward to the Christ candle to place their ballot in the basket. It was an awe-inspiring moment. Many were evidently in prayer.

Of the 423 delegates registered at Convention, 269 (64%) supported the resolution and 145 (34%) opposed it. The remaining 2% were absentees or informal votes. The vote was fair and close. The Constitution of the LCA requires a two-thirds majority on such an issue, and therefore the doctrine and practice of the church remains unchanged.

The outcome of the vote has left people with a variety of responses and emotions, some of them quite strong. This is hard, but it is human and quite normal. The bishops have also experienced a range of emotions, coupled with some exhaustion after working so intensely for so long. We believe, therefore, that it is too soon to understand the full impact of the vote. It is obvious, however, that there is work to be done. Part of that work, decided by Synod, is to prepare a doctrinal statement on the ordination of women and men.

Right now, though, there is something more immediate we need to be doing. In the closing sermon on Sunday I asked, 'What happens next?' The first thing we need to do is pause and breathe, just as the delegates did from time to time during the debate, and as Jesus also did after intense times in his ministry. This is



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not our church, but God's. That's why Convention resolved '**... that the church enter a period of careful theological reflection and pastoral work for the next synodical term...**'

During the closing hours of Convention, delegates were already demonstrating what we need to do. They had sat together throughout the Convention. They had dialogued and listened to each other, sharing what was on their hearts. Knowing one another as they now did, after the vote many remained behind to care for each other. People encouraged one another and quietly prayed together. Tears and fears were evident in the room, but there was also comfort and consolation.

The mutual consolation of Christians was clearly evident at that moment. For example, one table group that had expressed a wide divergence of passionately held views reported that they now value each other so much they will be friends for life. My prayer is that we will all commit ourselves to this type of action. *Where love comes to life* can be given new meaning as we lovingly work through the situation in which we find ourselves.

I especially encourage our pastors to follow in this way of Christ. Blessing and encouraging God's precious people must be at the forefront of our pastoral practice. Gentleness and compassion,

often sacrificial, must come first. It is written that despite everything that was done to him Jesus loved his own to the end. He willingly went to the cross for their sake (John 13:1). Pastors, as servants of Jesus Christ, can do no less at a time in the life of the church when so many people need your help and wise counsel.

So let's now take the space we need as we receive the outcome of the Convention. Your church leaders are feeling many of the same things that you are. We don't have immediate answers but we do know that it is unwise to rush into action before we have waited on the Lord.

Your bishops also recommend that as a church we wait a while before deciding on opening up public conversation spaces as we did with OWL. For this reason, we won't be receiving comments just yet on the Convention website or the LCA official Facebook page. If you are involved in private blogs or Facebook pages, please help the church by publishing content that exhibits Christian respect, love, grace and compassion. When all the parts of the body love and respect each other, so the whole body is honoured, and Christ is served.

Many delegates reported that the highlight of Convention was the daily celebration of our unity and of the

church of which our Saviour has made us a part. For the many of you who were not able to attend Convention, please ask your delegate to share with you his/her experience of the unity we shared around the Christ candle. Your bishops pray that all of us are strengthened to continue in this spirit. Each one of us can play a part, as we speak well of each other in love.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7 NIV).

To God be the glory.

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on behalf of the College of Bishops:
Rev John Henderson, LCA Bishop
Rev Dr Andrew Pfeiffer, LCA Assistant Bishop
Rev David Altus, Bishop SA/NT District
Rev Mark Lieschke, Bishop NSW District
Rev Greg Pfeiffer, Bishop WA District
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Rev Paul Smith, Bishop Qld District
Rev Mark Whitfield, Bishop LCNZ
Rev Neville Otto, Secretary of the Church